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UNH Received $400K Grant to Study How Changes in Ecosystems Impact Livelihoods in Resource-Dependent Areas
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October 14, 2010

DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire has received a $400,000 grant through the Disaster Resilience for Rural Communities Program, which is part of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture program of the USDA, to study how socio-economic and environmental changes impact resource-dependent rural communities.

The project, “Community and Forest: Linked Human-Ecosystem Responses to Natural Disturbances in Oregon,” will look specifically at community socio-economic and ecological conditions in the Wallowa-Whitman Ecosystem in eastern Oregon, a place that exemplifies the dynamics and challenges of forest-dependent rural communities in the West.

“The proposed research will show how changing socio-ecological conditions in historically resource-dependent communities impact livelihoods, the environment, and human safety. The Wallowa-Whitman Ecosystem provides a good example to examine communities in rural America confronting the challenges of declining timber production and the new economies and cultures of high-amenity consumption. Communities face declining forest health, increased vulnerability to wildfire and insects, and stresses on their cultural identities,” said Joel Hartter, assistant professor of geography and the principal investigator on the project.

Within the Blue Mountains in northeastern Oregon, the Wallowa-Whitman Ecosystem encompasses the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, which includes 2.3 million acres and three adjacent counties: Baker, Union, and Wallowa in eastern Oregon.

“Furthering our understanding of these dynamics will improve the ability of community leaders and policymakers to make new investments in their communities and support initiatives that contribute to adaptation strategies,” Hartter said.

The project’s co-principal investigators are Russ Congalton, professor of remote sensing and geographic information systems; Mark Ducey, professor of forest biometrics and management; and Larry Hamilton, professor of sociology.

Additional partners in the project are the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire, U.S. Forest Service (Wallowa-Whitman National Forest), Oregon Department of Forestry, Wallowa Resources, and Oregon State University Forestry Extension.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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